CATHOLIC



RECORD

Diocese of Columbus

SOCIETY

Volume VI

April, 1980

No. 4

REV. MSGR. H. E. MATTINGLY EDITOR 197 EAST GAY STREET COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215

THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY IN A LETTER OF 1900(1)

San Clemente, Rome, Italy Oct. 18th, 1900

My dear Cousin (2):

I have been very busy for two weeks answering letters, and am just finishing up. I put off your letter until the last, because I wished it the longest. Are you satisfied with that arrangement? If you say yes, I shall go on, otherwise I fear it must be good-bye until your anger subsides.

First of all, without further introductory remarks, I must tell you of the very enjoyable vacation we had this summer. After Fr. Horn (3) had passed his collegiate exam we went to the Master General and asked permission to leave Rome for about a month. The good old Man granted the permission without a word.

On Sept. 6th we boarded the first north bound train, and early in the afternoon, arrived in Florence. We remained there three days, having a very pleasant time meanwhile with our old Dominican friends at Santa Maria Novella. We had spent two weeks in Florence in '98, and had seen things pretty thoroughly; yet we deemed that beautiful and interesting center of medieval art and Italian culture worthy of another visit. We had to see things hurriedly, however, as we had other arrangements.

On the 9th we went to Bologna where we said Mass at the beautiful, artistic tomb of our own St. Dominic. From there we went to Verona, by way of Modena. At the latter place we stopped for a few hours. At Verona we remained over night for the purpose of seeing the church of San Zeno — one of the oldest in Italy and the house of Shakespeare's heroine Juliet. All these things we had been forced to neglect seeing when in Verona two years ago. No English speaking person could leave Italy without seeing the tomb in which lies buried the lovely but unfortunate Juliet. We inscribed our names in the custodian's register. Should you happen to pass through Verona some day, you will doubtless be able to recognize your worthy cousin's bold signature.

Early in the morning of the 13th we took our departure from Verona, and after a run of 12 hours we arrived in Munich, Germany. Our object in going to that region was to see the much talked of Passion Play at Oberammergau. We were so fortunate as to be able to find tickets for the representation that was given on the 15th. I presume you have read many interesting articles about the

famed drama, and will fail to appreciate any remarks of mine about the same. Yet, at the risk of being tedious, I shall give you a brief history of the play, as it is given in these days, and a short description of some of the principal scenes.

Early in the 16th century, owing to the 30-Year War, a dreadful plague broke out in the many German cities and towns. People were dying by the thousands. For a long time the pretty little village of Oberammergau, nestling among the snow-capped Alps, escaped the visitation. The villagers made every effort to prevent its introduction among them. They forbade the inhabitants to go beyond the immediate vicinity of the town. They posted sentinels to see that strangers were kept out.

But a certain native of Oberammergau, who had been working in a distant city, got homesick and determined to return to see his wife and children. The next day he took sick and died of the plague. Within a month thirty of the villagers had succumbed to the terrible malady. The town was in an uproar. A meeting of all the inhabitants was called for the purpose of taking measures for combating the disease. The people, all being good Catholics and thoroughly religious in mind and heart, determined to leave it all in the hands of the Good God. They made a vow that should the ravages of the plague in their town be stopped they would give in thanksgiving a theatrical representation that would show forth to the world the Passion and Death of Christ. History tells us that from that day no case of plague was reported in Oberammergau.

The pious villagers, in fulfillment of their vow, gave for the first time their now famous Passion Play. For some time the repetition was given at irregular intervals of time. Of late it is repeated every ten years. I must here remark that all the actors, the singers, the managers of the play, and all who have anything to do with it, are inhabitants of Oberammergau, village of some 1300 souls. No outsider is permitted to have any part in the play, except in the role of spectator. With the natives, the play is not a money making drama, but a religious ceremony. They perform it as piously as any good Christian says his prayers. They are a simple peasant people, and cannot be spoiled by all the adulation and praise showered upon them by visitors from all parts of the world. They have been offered fabulous sums to go to London or New York with their play. Their only reply has been that they have no desire to make money, that their play is with them a religious service, and that they desire to remain in their simple village.

All the actors dress in old Jewish fashion and endeavor to make themselves as similar as possible to the characters they represent. In some of them there is a remarkable natural resemblance to the characters in that real tragical Passion seen on Golgotha's height two thousand years ago. For instance, Mr. Lang, a young man of 25 who plays the part of Christ has all the appearance of being just such a man as we ourselves picture Our Lord to have been. He has the same long hair and bears the same deep toned voice and the stately bearing historians and commentators tell us were distinctive features of Our Divine Lord.

Then again those who act the parts of Our Blessed Mother, of the Magdalene, of the Apostles and of the Jewish High Priests, all are true to life. After one has seen them act for a time, he almost comes to imagine himself living in the long ago and assisting at the real scourging, the real Crucifixion, the

Last Supper, etc. It is all terribly realist. I believe a person is better for having seen it. He has a clearer idea of what Christ suffered. The acting is not bad despite the fact that all the actors are mere village tradesmen or country farmers. Of course they are trained to do it. Those of them who are children now, acted minor parts this year in anticipation of the time when they may succeed to their elders and play a leading role. In several scenes there were many hundreds of people on the stage, some of whom were children of 4 or 5 years of age. Each acted his part like a veteran. So you see that by the time these little tots grow up they will be able to play a part, notwithstanding the fact that they get no professional training.

Of the play itself I need only say it is exceedingly impressive and worth going a long distance to see. It is as I have said a complete representation of Our Savior's Passion, beginning with His entrance into Jerusalem and terminating with the Ascension. I shall not attempt to give you a detailed description of the Play. That would take me beyond the limits of even an extraordinarily long letter, and can be postponed until the time when I shall be with you in old Ohio. So for the time I shall confine my remarks to a short description of some of the more remarkable scenes.

Perhaps the finest scene of the whole play is the first - Our Lord enters Jerusalem. The curtain is drawn and singing is heard in the distance. Then from the entrance door, painted to look like streets, issue hundreds of men, women, and children bearing palm branches in their hands and singing: "Hosanna to the Highest". As they come slowly on the stage, Our Lord appears seated upon the real scriptural ass and blessing the people as he passes. The scene is well enacted - even the little ass seems to know he has a part to play. He keeps kicking at the flies, and altogether conducts himself just as such an animal should. It was the first scene of the great Passion Play; the first time Our Lord appears. We were all worked up to a high pitch of excitement. The scene was so realistic that it was not difficult for us to deceive ourselves into thinking we were looking upon the real Christ; and upon His real entry into the Holy City of old. We sat spellbound until the curtain was drawn. From that time until the play was over, our interest never flagged.

The most affecting scene of the play is that in which Our Lord bids farewell at Bethany to His Blessed Mother and the Apostles after telling them that He is soon to suffer death. The scene is true to life and full of pathos. Men and women in the audience cried like children. It brought back to our minds the time when we too bade farewell to kindred and home and went wandering, perhaps never to return.

The tragedian of the play and the strongest actor is the villain - traitor Judas. The man who played the part this year is an old hand at it, and was of course more accustomed to his work. The scene in which he declares to the High Priests his conviction that he has betrayed an innocent Blood and his wish to return the 30 pieces of silver, is tragical to the highest extent. Then his despair at being told that he alone must be responsible, is remarkably well simulated. The scene had to be cut short just as he was preparing to hang himself. A real hanging would have upset completely the nerves of the auditors. Poor Judas! One is tempted to judge more leniently of him and his crime after having witnessed the Passion Play.

The climax of the play is the Crucifixion scene. We did not see the Jews

in the act of nailing Our Lord to the Cross. All of that was done before the curtain was drawn. But we saw the Cross put into position. Those who play the part of Our Lord and the thieves remain on their crosses for at least 25 minutes. After each representation they are completely exhausted. But I spare you the harrowing details. I have exceeded limits already, and must leave all further remarks about the play until the time when we can have a talk together.

After we saw the play we returned to Munich and remained there two weeks. It is a fine American-like town and full of interesting sights. In our lodging house there were about twenty American students from the various European universities, from Paris, Eichstadt, Innsbruck and Rome. Some of the latter were old friends of ours, and of course we were not long in becoming acquainted with those who previously had been unknown to us. I was exceedingly sorry to have to miss Rod MacEachen (4). Had I known that he would have arrived in Munich about Oct. 7th, I could have easily arranged our plans so as to have met him there. I had thought that should Rod make arrangements to come to Europe, he would sail to Naples and pay me a visit here at Rome about Oct. 1st. I wanted to be here to give him a grand reception. So we made all our plans with that in view and thus missed him - our old friend. I wrote to Rod to come here at Easter if he is unable to come sooner.

While on our way home from Munich we stopped off for a few hours in Innsbruck to see the great Jesuit University where Rod is studying. The town is small but rather pretty. The univsersity is a fine one, but I venture the assertion that Rome and the Roamn schools beat them all. From there we took a 20-hours run all the way to Loreto, Italy. While there we had the privilege of celebrating Mass in the house where the Blessed Virgin was born. Of course the Blessed Virgin was born in Palestine, but according to tradition the house was miraculously transported to Loreto around seven centuries ago. A large church has been built around it, and it has become quite a famous sanctuary. Masses are said daily until 5 o'clock p.m. We had some difficulty in getting permission to celebrate at the privileged altar, but all difficulties gave way before our indomitable American pluck and determination. From Loreto we went to Foligno and Assisi. At the latter place we saw many places of interest connected with the life of St. Francis, such as the house in which he was born, the cell in which he was imprisoned by his father, and the place where the Indulgence of the Portiuncula was revealed to him. We also said Mass at his tomb.

Last Saturday I again saw the Pope. He is well and sends his kindest regards. For the past six weeks he has been busy with the Holy Year pilgrims, being obliged to go to St. Peter's about thrice a week to give the Apostolic Blessing. I do not see how a man of 91 summers manages to get through as much work. It would soon kill a younger man, yet he doesn't seem to mind it. I think that he is as healthy and as strong as when I first saw him three years ago.

At present there are about twenty thousand pilgrims in the city - English, Italians, Germans and Spaniards. A crowd of 200 Irish are expected tomorrow. Old Ireland is sending rather a small number, but we must remember that it costs a good sum to come all that distance. Besides that about five hundred came with the English pilgrimage, owing to the ratio being lower.

I had a letter some days ago from John. He is still in the Philippines

engaged in Uncle Bill McKinley's benevolent assimilation work. According to him the war is not over yet, and may continue for many years. I wish he were out of it and at home. The war is a curse - nothing, I think, of which an American should feel proud.

We haven't received much news from St. Joseph's (5) lately. The fellows must have a grudge against us poor exiles. The last news we had was of Father Kennedy's (6) re-election as Prior and about the ordinations. Father Roach (7) of Kentucky sent us the "Columbian" with a full account of the Bishop's (8) consecration; and with Father Kearny's (9) sermon in full. The sermon was worthy of the occasion and of the man who delivered it. What do the people think of the new Bishop? Satisfied with him, are they?

Well, this is undoubtedly the longest letter that I ever wrote. I suppose you can find enough spare time to study it out. I promise that if you forgive me this long letter I shall never write such a long one again.

By the way, I don't want my description of the Passion Play published. Some of my friends wrote home long descriptions of it, and their crazy American people published them. If anyone played me that trick, I should never forgive them. Of course I feel certain you would not have the bad taste to do anything of that kind. So, after all it was quite unnecessary to mention it.

With all kinds of best wishes to the folks and hoping soon to receive a long letter from you,

I am affectionately,

W.D.NOON. O.P.

- (1) This letter was written by Rev. W. Dominic Noon, O.P. (1875-1952), and is printed here through the courtesy of Mrs. Genevieve Finnen Frison of Columbus.
- Lillian McGonagle, mother of Mrs. Frison.
- Rev. Francis Horn, O.P. (1873-1943).
- Rev. Msgr. Roderick MacEachen (1873-1965)
- St. Joseph's Dominican Priory, Somerset, Ohio. Rev. Daniel J. Kennedy, O.P. (1863-1930).
- Rev. John Roach, O.P. (1870-1940).
- Bishop Henry Moeller.
- Rev. Lawrence Kearny, O.P., S.T.M. (1861-1924)

Notes

Mr. Don Schlegel, charter member of the Catholic Record Society, has just published his book, Passengers from Ireland, which gives the lists of passengers arriving at American ports between 1811 and 1817. The book is published by the Genealogical Publishing Co, Inc., 111 Water St., Baltimore, Maryland 21202.

Miss Donna M. Wolf, Ph.D., would like to interview descendants of early Irish residents of Columbus to help in her research of those pioneers. She may be reached at 2397 Pinecrest Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43229.

MT. CALVARY CEMETERY BURIAL RECORDS (Continued)

1884 (Cont.)

Kreuzer, Josephina, Dec. 16 Hock, Cornelius, Dec. 17 Siegrist, Marie, Dec. 18 Hinterschied, Peter Martin, Dec 23 Hinterschied, Maria Henrietta, Dec. 28 Luft, Katharina, Dec. 31

1885

Lutz, Salmoe, Jan. --Bauman, Joseph, Jan. 6 Engler, Johann, wife of, Jan. 6 Heinz, Rosina, Jan. 14 Richter, Anton & Maria, Jan. 7 Hurst, Jack, Child of, Jan. 25 Schmid, Harry, Feb. 10 Doersam, Helena, Feb. 12 Weider, Ludwig, Feb. 25 Ehret, Wilhelm, March 16 Knoblauch, Barbara, March 24 Lang, Mathias, March 25 Marquart, Peter, March 30 Busch, Alois, April 5 Boeschel, Jakob, April 5 Weiss, Maria Anna, April 6 Wiser, August, April 18 Wingels, Franz, April 25 Wenger, Elizabeth A., April 26 Gleich, Adolf, April 27 Weber, Friedrich, April 28 Buechner, Wilhelm, April 28 Meder, Karl, Child of, May 1 Thurn, Leo, May 3 Bauman, Amalia, May 14 Brehl, Adam, June 4 Obert, Karl, June 7 Schlereth, Andreas, June 9 Reb, Elizabeth, July 24 Fischer, Joseph, July 24 Trott, Johan, Child of, July 25 Rudolf, Aloisia, Aug. 12 Maurer, Flora Isabella, Aug. 14 Walder, Herman Peter, Aug. 17 Jellenick, Theresia, Aug. 19 Roehrenbeck, Jakob, Aug. 21 Maeder, Maria, Aug. 26 Kessler, Eva, Sept. 7 Wehrle, Maria Elizabeth, Sept. 10 Berger, MAria, Sept. 24 Breith, Margaretha, Sept. 24

Preston, Elizabeth, Oct. 5 Nothnagel, Heinrich, Oct. 21 Birgenbach, Johann, Oct. 22 Gramlich, Franz Wilhelm, Oct. 24 Bernhart, Georg Albert, Nov. 1 Eichner, Johann, Nov. 7 Hirsch, Mari Anna, Nov. 7 Jelsenberger, Joseph, Nov. 15 Mueller, Maria, Nov. 23 Igel, Georg, Nov. 29 Kennedy, Johanna, Dec. 9 Hindler, Franz, Dec. 13 Rapp, Joseph, Dec. 19 Bauman, Ferdinand August, Dec. 19 Rohr, Frank, Dec. 31 Buechner, Andreas, Dec. 31

1886

Beck, Theresia, Jan. 5 Achatz, Franziska, Jan. 13 Schaefer, Josephina, Jan. 25 Sands, Francis William, Feb. --Schmid, Martin, Feb. 11 Vohl (Voll?), Christina, Feb. 11 Sister Coleta, from St. Vincent Orphanage, Feb. 23 Igel, Ferdinand, Jan. 24 Igel, Louise, Feb. 24 Igel, Margareth, Feb. 24 Stutz, Sebastian, March 3 Bauer, Adam, March 9 Unversagt, Maria Eva, March 15 Rohner, Georg Franz, March 23 Neumeier, Josephine, March 23 Eierman, Johan, April 22 Baumann, Georg, April 22 Scholl, Mary Magdalena, April 24 McLean, John, April 28 Buerkle, Lucian, April 28 Kiefer, Joseph, April 30 Zinner, Georg, May 1 Carmilla, Sister, May 15 Wagner, Felix, May 17 Oesterley, Herman Joh., May 24 Buchholtz, Klara, May 26 Wirth, Louis, May 26 Mueller, Johan, June 2 Kerle, Michael, June 11 Tihl, Maria Franziska, June 17 Hadler, Franz, June 20 Trott. Eustasius, June 27

1886 (Cont.)

Kegelmaier, George, June 27 Fuerst, Emma, July 6 Scharf, Franz, July 8 Eierman, Heinrich, July 16 Hellenthal, Nikolaus, July 17 Nunermacher, Mathilda, July 18 Dotter, Emilia, July 20 Ahatz, Johann, July 20 Seeburger, Franziska, Aug. 3 Haesele, Flora Barbara, Aug. 4 Schreiner, Heinrich, Aug. -Schumacher, Barbara Cecilia, Aug. 8 Schrenkeisen, Maria, Aug. 8 Ohsner, Mathias, Aug. 16 Flood, James Henry, from the old cemetery, Aug. 26 Stecher, Wilhelm Franziskus, Sept. 1 Meinert, Peter, Sept. 3 Ruhl, Anton, Sept. 4 Koch, Eduard, Sept. 6 Yohn, Elizabeth, Sept. 9 Daum, Elizabeth, Sept. 12 Johum, Johann, Sept. 20 Wolf, Louise, Sept. 26 Rusk, Mary Josephine, Oct. 5 Reis, Joseph, Oct. 16 Gleich, Apolonia, Oct. 16 Deinhart, Maria, Oct. 27 Shrenk, Georg, Oct. 28 Ritzman, Margt. Kiefer, from the old cemetery, Nov. 4 Essenpreis, Ulrich, from the old cemetery, Nov. 4 Letteri, Child of Karl, Nov. Kaufman, Flora Antonia, Dec. 8 Beide, Karl, Dec. 8 Boeschel, Johann, Dec. 10 Gramlich, Pailina, Dec. 11 Purcy, Cara Maria, Dec. 16 Zimmer, Emma Louisa, Dec. 20

1887

Zentgraf, Amalia, Jan. 1 Loviner, Maria Magdalena, Jan. 6 Woelfel, Joseph, Jan. 6 Selig, Theresia, Jan. 10 Selig, Georg Eduaard, Jan. 15 Kathariner, Anton, Jan. 17 Stiekel, Elizabeth, Jan. 26 Luntz, Anna Maria, Jan. 31

Dimmerling, Elizabeth, Feb. 3 Doner, Maurice, Feb. 6 Fritz, Mari, Feb. 8 Schirtsinger, Rosina, Feb. 9 Stieckl(?), Anna Elizabeth, Feb. 9 Ebt, Margaret, Feb. 9 Kapper, Joseph Edward, Feb. 22 Frey, Maria, Feb. 27 Hinterschitt, Johann, March 2 Rickley, Mina, March 3 Waegman, Mathilty, March 11 Waegmann, Joseph, March 11 Trott, Hilarie, March 14 Reinhart, Catharina, March 21 Osner, Fransiska, March 18 Blosauer, Elis., March 20 Woelfel, Maria, March 21 Masbrau, Lorenz, March 31 Straub, Joseph, March 31 Mueller, Johann, March 31 Eiermann, Maria Franziska, April 1 Haas, Anton, April 7 Schmitt, Franz Va., (62), April 14 Morison, Julia A. (61), April 1 Beckert, Mara (22), April 13 Becker, Catharina (85), April 17 Hietler, Maria (24), April 19 Hebt, Julia (22), April 25 Buff, Lucretia (24), April 28 Rusinger, Conrad (40), April 19 Hebt, Johannes (-), May 1 John, Child of John, April 25 Schmitt, Johan (40), May 7 Haettel, Franz (--), May 18 Kronenberger, Catharina (65), May 22 Goehl, Georg (42), May 23 Ritel, Franz, May 31 Becker, Franz Carl, May 31 Valentin, Maria Magdalena, May 31 Bernhart, Alexander (64), June 12 Val-Reis, Johannes (20), June 17 Buff, Veronica (10M), June 19 Dury, Child of Albert, June 23 Steinzel, Peter (15M), June 15 Bauer, Maria (1Y), July 4 Emelheinz, Heinrich (62), July 5 Schumacher, Theresia (72), July 2 Frank, Eva (68), July 7 Teufel, Theresia (73), July 11 Muth, Johan (62), July 15 Stai, Catharina (26), June 9 Kellner, Georg (82), July 20 Lagemann, Maria (16), July 27

1887 (Cont.)

Buetmueler, Bernhart Urban (1Y), July July 16 Fuerst, Elizabeth (4M), July 18 Seitenstecher, Lois F. (5M), July 18 Sufferlen, Margreta (8), July 13 Theado, Maria C. (4M), July 16 Lietsch, Valentin (25), July 19 Burgstaler, Franz X. (1Y), July 20 Cull, Boso (10), July 30 Manns, Edward (16), July 31 Herrens, Wilhelm (4), Aug. 3 Kaiser, Johannes (66), Aug. 4 Schafhauser, Caspar (52), Aug. 5 Tiel, Child of Jacob, Aug. 5 Bensheimer, 2 children of Philip, Aug. 6 Kaiser, Valentin R. (6M), Aug. 9 Bettinger, Johan L. (1D), Aug. 15 Buerkle, Erwin (72), Aug. 18 Knatler, Joseph (8M), Sept. 2 Gschwilm, Franz (32), Sept. 2 Behlen, Karl (70), Sept. 3 Getreu, Johannes (71), Sept. 6 Harrn (?), Harry (11), Sept. 18 Montigny, Estelle (8), Sept. 12 Eigensee, Johan (79), Oct. — Gebhart, Charlotte (12), Oct. 8 Werner, Margaretha, Oct. 31 (40) Klober, August (40), Nov. 2 Gangloff, Mathias and Mariann, Nov. 11 Dury, Felix and Cornelius, Nov. 11 Wegman, Joseph (54), Nov. 12 Gibbons, Maggie, Nov. 13 (9) Glass, Louise (1Y), Nov. 13 Kollmer, Margareta (84), Nov. 18 Fink, Wilhelm J. (10), Nov. 20 Getreu, Child of Adam, Nov, 22 Dailey, William (5), Nov. 25 Kuchler, Mary (34), Nov. 10 Jochim, Mary (74), Nov. 28 Mueller, Cornelia (1Y), Dec. 5 Abel, Emile (5), Dec. 13 Osner, Theresia (76), Dec. 20 Wenger, Franz (67), Dec. 24

1888

Mueller, Child of Joseph, Jan. 7 Osppam, Catarina (46), Jan. 7

Widmeier, Johann (49), Jan. 11 Mulligan, William (3), Jan 11 Mueller, Herman J. (2), Jan. 12 Abevelt, Anna (69), Jan. 19 Gatterdam, Nicolaus (66), Jan. 18 Diemal, Maria Mina (1Y), Jan. 26 Koebbler, Franz (83), Jan. 10 Herb, Anna (21), Jan. 30 Lutz, Heinrich (87), Jan. 25 Klott, Konstantin (75), Jan. 8 Schmiesterson, Margaretha (65), Feb. 5 Steele, Maria (31), Feb. 13 Deibel, Franz M. (1Y), Feb. 21 Zink, Lena (39), Feb. 7 Wobenmaier, Philip V. (36), Feb. 16 Beck, Lorenz (81), Feb. 22 Koenig, Elizabeth (--), Feb. 26 Schiesser, Christine (3Y), March 20 Hinzler, Child of Johan, March 12 Ling, Berta (21), March 16 Boerschel, Catharina (36), March 28 Wenger, John Adam (--), April 1 Trott, Jakob (---), April 7 Maerz, Peter (21), April 10 Mueller, John Albert (--), April 10 Wietman, Anna Maria (64), April 15 Lantbrick, Catharina (7M), April 24 Trautman, Carl (17), April 30 Deibel, Franz (2M), April 21 Weyman, Agnes (20), April 23 Stengel, Hubert (34), April 21 Ziegelmeier, Johan (38), April 29 Sifferlin, Xaver (--), April 29 Full, Maria (14), April 29 Klingler, Theresia (1Y), April 14 Mueller, Joseph (70), May 2 Leitinger, Gertrut (81), May 10 Sandbrink, Marg. (72), May 13 Schmitt, Child of John, May 12 Becker, Harry (2Y), May 15 Burkle, Xaver (68), May 25 Kaufman, John (54), June 3 Straub, Jakob J. (10M), June 8 Stein, Barbara (73), June 13 Brauer, Joseph (42), June 14 Buerkle, Brigita (69), June 14 Hageman, Wilhelm (53), June 25 Kuenzel, Florentina (9M), July 1 Schmit, Clara C. (24D), July 5 Frank(Fork?), Joseph A., July 2 Frabinger, ---- (56), July 14

(To be continued)